

Cyberchondria among College Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, the internet has become a major source of health information, offering a vast amount of knowledge at our fingertips. While some individuals find empowerment in accessing health information online, others experience heightened anxiety. This anxiety often stems from excessive searching behaviour, known as cyberchondria, triggered by ambiguous or conflicting online information. Cyberchondria leads to uncertainty and distress, impacting mental well-being. Cyberchondria is a distinct construct linked to health anxiety and can impact the relationship between healthcare providers and clients. This study aimed to assess the level of cyberchondria among college teachers in Coimbatore and examine its association with demographic variables. A sample of 100 college teachers were selected using non-probability convenient sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, and the level of cyberchondria was measured using a modified Cyberchondria Severity Scale. The findings showed that the majority of the teachers had a mild level of cyberchondria, while a small percentage exhibited a moderate level. Significant associations were found between qualification and the level of cyberchondria, while no significant associations were found with other demographic variables. The study's implications highlight the need for awareness and educational programs among nursing students and healthcare professionals to address the negative effects of cyberchondria.

KEYWORDS: *Cyberchondria, Online health information, Health anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become a primary source of health information in the twenty-first century, offering easy access to a wealth of knowledge. While some individuals feel empowered after searching for health information online, others experience increased anxiety. This excessive searching behavior, known as cyberchondria, can be triggered by ambiguous or conflicting online information, leading to uncertainty and distress. Studies have highlighted the prevalence and impact of cyberchondria, with a significant positive correlation between psychological distress, cyberchondria, and uncertainty. Cyberchondria is a distinct construct related to health anxiety, and it can affect the relationship between healthcare providers and clients. Given its negative association with mental health, this study aims to assess the level of

cyberchondria among college teachers in Coimbatore and its association with demographic variables, contributing to a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Objective

- To assess the level of cyberchondria among teachers.
- To explore the association between the level of cyberchondria and selected demographic variables.

Operational Definition

Cyberchondria: Unfounded anxiety concerning one's health brought on by visiting health and medical websites. In this study, the level of cyberchondria will be measured using a modified cyberchondria severity scale for teachers.

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College teachers: Teachers working in Arts and Science Colleges and Health Science Institutions, including both male and female teachers with graduate and postgraduate qualifications.

Assumption

The level of cyberchondria among college teachers will vary from individual to individual.

Delimitation

This study is delimited to Arts and Science College teachers and Health Science teachers.

Scope of the study

This study aims to identify the level of cyberchondria among college teachers, providing insights into the prevalence and impact of cyberchondria in this specific population

Literature Review

The review includes various studies conducted worldwide, focusing on different aspects of cyberchondria. The studies explored the relationship between cyberchondria and factors such as compulsive internet use, health anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, intolerance of uncertainty, and psychological distress. The findings of reviews consistently indicate a positive association between cyberchondria and these factors. Furthermore, the review highlights the impact of cyberchondria during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the increased reliance on online health information and its potential effects on mental health. The studies also discuss the

Results

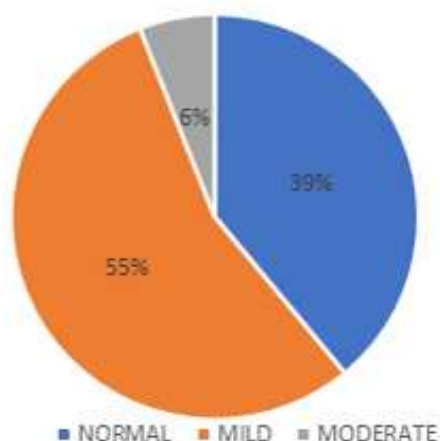
The study findings revealed that most of the samples were females (65%), from nuclear family (68%), in the age group (65%), were living in urban area (59%) and were married (73%). More than half of samples were from Arts and Science college (53%) with Post Graduate qualification (39%) and were assistant professor (45%) with month income of RS 20,000 - 35,000 (41%). Based on health related information, nearly one third of the samples 28 (28%) had health issue, out of 28 samples 18 (64.28%) had the health problem for more than 6 month and 5 (17.86%) had diabetic mellitus, 5 (17.86%) had hypertension and 4 (14.28%) had asthma. One fifth of the samples 21(21%) had undergone surgery. More than half of the samples 53(53%) had preferred to search on internet for health issues and they search the symptoms such as fever 12(22.64%), stomach pain 15 (28.30%) head ache 10 (18.86%). 12(12%) of the samples taken medication by searching internet.

demographic variables associated with cyberchondria and its negative impact on quality of life.

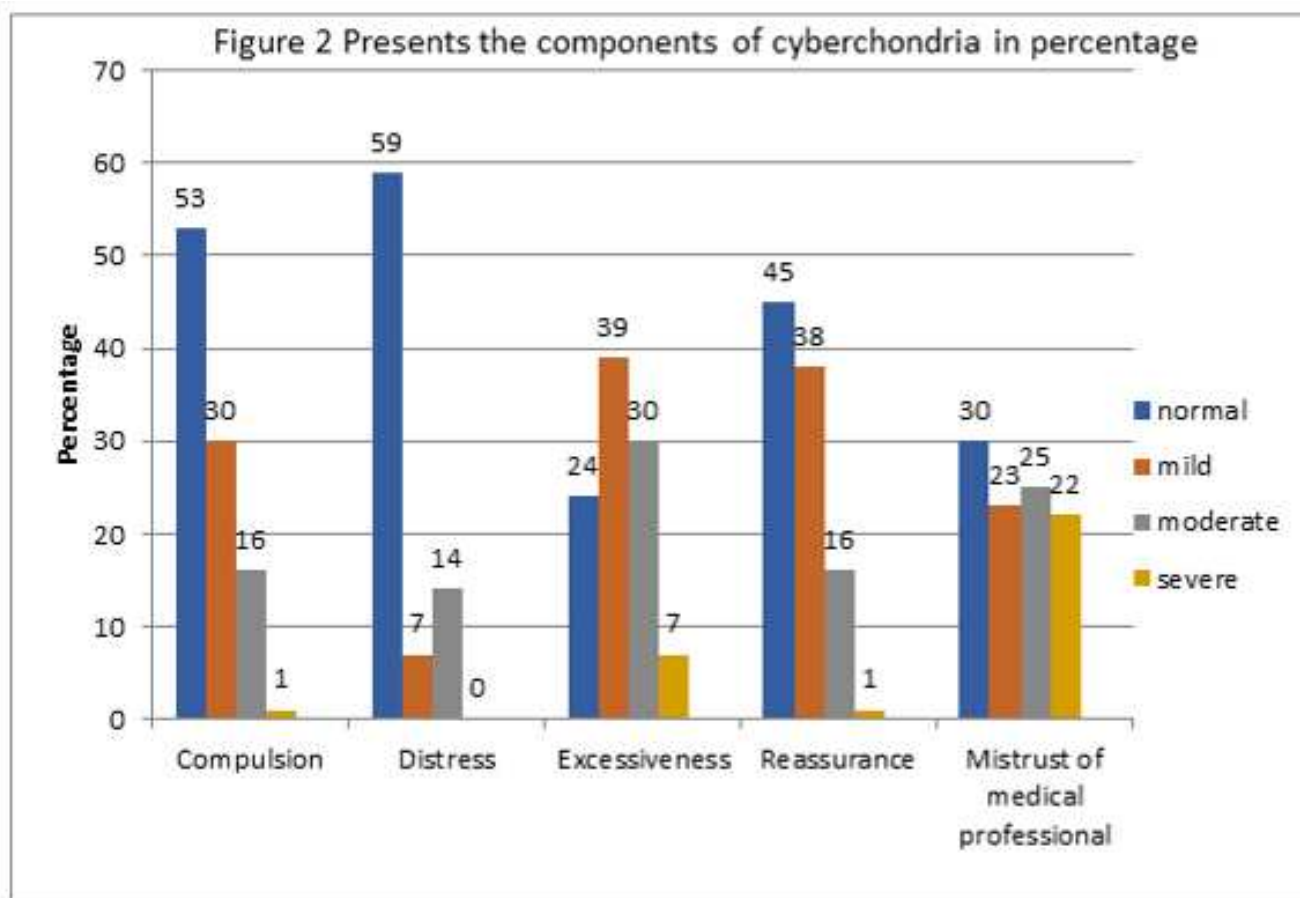
Methodology

The research approach chosen for this study was quantitative, and a descriptive research design was employed. The study was conducted at RVS Institution in Sulur, Coimbatore. A sample size of 100 teachers from Arts & Science and Health Science College and were selected using non-probability convenient sampling. The criteria for sample selection included willingness to participate, age between 25-45 years, and both male and female teachers. The data collection tool used was a structured questionnaire consisting of two parts: Demographic variables and the Modified Cyberchondria Severity Scale. The validity of the tool was assessed by nursing experts, and reliability was tested using the test-retest method ($r=0.872$). For data collection, obtained permission from the institution, explained the study to the participants and obtained oral consent from the sample, and allocating 15-20 minutes for questionnaire completion. The data were analyzed using SPSS software, including frequency and percentage for demographic variables and the level of cyberchondria, and chi-square test for association analysis. Ethical considerations were followed, including obtaining permission and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Figure 1 presents the level of cyberchondria in percentage



The figure presents the percentage distribution of the level of cyberchondria among the samples. It shows that 39 (39.0%) of the samples were classified as having a normal level of cyberchondria, 55 (55.0%) had a mild level, and 6 (6.0%) had a moderate level. The majority of the samples were found to have either a mild or moderate level of cyberchondria among college teachers.



From the above figure, the majority of the samples had a mild level of cyberchondria in the compulsion, distress, excessiveness, and reassurance components. However, a significant proportion of the samples exhibited a severe level of cyberchondria in the mistrust of medical professionals component. These findings suggest that while most participants had relatively low levels of cyberchondria, there was a notable level of distrust towards medical professionals, potentially influencing their online health-seeking behaviours and attitudes.

Personal characteristics	Level of cyberchondria			χ^2 value	P<0.05 Table value Df
	Normal	Mild	Moderate		
Age in years					
• < 25	2	12	1	4.99	df=2
• ≥ 25	37	43	5	NS	5.99
Sex					
• Male	16	16	3	2.060	df=2
• Female	23	39	3	NS	5.99
Area of living (N=94)					
• Urban	23	30	6	0.182	df=1
• Rural	16	25	0	NS	3.84
Type of family					
• Nuclear	25	30	5	0.951	df=2
• Joint	14	25	1	NS	5.99
Qualification					
• UG	3	12	2	16.923	df=2
• PG and more	36	43	4	S	5.99

Department					
• Medical science	15	27	5	4.418	df=2
• Arts and science	24	28	1	NS	5.99
Designation					
• Associate Professor/Professor	13	16	1		
• Assistant professor	19	24	2	4.224	df =6
• Lecturer	3	6	1	NS	12.59
• Assistant lecturer	4	9	2		
Marital status					
• Married	31	39	3	2.565	df=2
• Unmarried	8	16	3	NS	5.99
Income					
• <Rs.20,000	14	18	3	0.898	df=4
• Rs.20,000-35,000	15	24	2	NS	9.49
• >Rs.35,000	10	13	1		

Table-1 shows that the association between the selected personal characteristics and level of cyberchondria. The finding from table shows that there is a significant association between the qualification and level of cyberchondria and no significant association between level of cyberchondria and other demographic characteristics such as age in years, sex, area of living, type of family, department, designation, marital status, income.

Conclusion

The study concluded that majority of the sample had mild and moderate level of Cyberchondria among college teachers.

Implication

The study's implications includes raising awareness among nursing students and conducting in-service educational programs to address the negative effects of cyberchondria. Psychiatric nurses are important in managing the psychological aspects of cyberchondria, and nurse administrators to be encouraged to organize educational programs on cyberchondria.

Limitation

The limitations of the study includes the small sample size and only samples from restricted area

Recommendation

- A similar study may be replicated on a large sample to validate and generalize the findings.
- An exploratory study can be conducted to assess the prevalence of Cyberchondria among community people.
- A comparative study can be conducted to assess the level of Cyberchondria among adult in rural and urban community.

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